

College of Agriculture & Life Sciences
Department of Horticultural Science

GROWING BLUEBERRIES IN THE HOME GARDEN

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Blueberries can be grown in home gardens anywhere in North Carolina if the right species and proper soil modifications are used. Blueberries are typically used in the landscape as hedges for screening purposes, but they can also be used in cluster plantings, or as single specimen plants. Blueberries are an ideal year round addition to the landscape. They have delicate white or pink flowers in the spring, the summer fruit has an attractive sky blue color, and the fall foliage adds great red and yellow colors to the landscape. In addition, blueberry plants lend themselves to the 'organic' approach of gardening, since pesticides are rarely needed in home garden plantings.

Soil pH - Blueberries require a lower pH than many other small fruit crops. Before planting, take a soil test. Apply wettable sulfur (90% S) if pH is above 5.3 for rabbiteye blueberries or 5.0 for highbush blueberries. Use 1.0 pound (2.5 cups) per 100 square feet on sandy soils to lower pH by 1 unit (for instance, from 6.0 to 5.0). Apply 2.0 pounds per 100 square feet for the same amount of pH lowering on heavier soils containing silt, clay or more than 2% organic matter. Try to achieve a pH of around 4.8; too much reduction can be detrimental to bush growth. Apply sulfur at least 3-4 months before planting, and take another soil test before planting. If pH is still above the acceptable range, additional sulfur can be applied. If you

must plant without an initial soil test, mix 1 cubic foot of peat moss with an equal amount of sand. On a heavy clay soil or a soil that sometimes remains wet, put the peat-sand mixture on the soil surface. If you are certain the soil has good internal drainage, part of the peat-sand mixture can go in a hole or furrow several inches below the soil surface. However, leave enough of the peat-sand mixture to form a mound (single plant) or ridge (row of plants) at least 6 inches above the surrounding soil surface (Figure 1). The mound or ridge will insure against damage from excess water, however, with this planting method, water thoroughly 2 to 3 times per week during dry periods, because the raised peat-sand mix will dry out quickly.

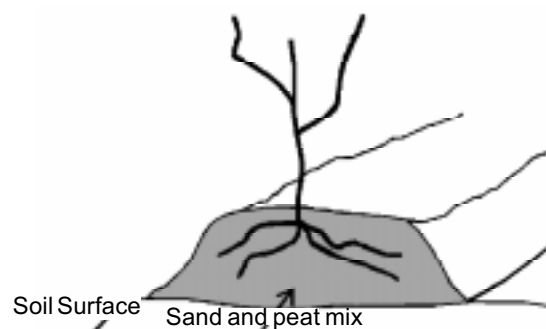


Figure 1. Blueberry plant set in peat sand mixture.

Organic Additions - If the soil contains less than 2% organic matter (OM on soil test report) incorporating peat moss or well-decayed pine sawdust or bark will improve plant survival and growth. Apply 3 to 4 inches of the organic material

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